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## **SEEKING THE SOUL TRIUMPHS IN GRADE I, \$500,000 CLARK HANDICAP**

**LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Friday, Nov. 24, 2017)** – The team of owner/breeder **Charles Fipke**, trainer **Dallas Stewart** and jockey **John Velazquez** did it again.

Three weeks after landing the \$2 million Longines Breeders' Cup Distaff (Grade I) at Del Mar with Fipke's homebred mare **Forever Unbridled**, the trio teamed to win Friday's 143<sup>rd</sup> running of the \$500,000 Clark Handicap Presented by Norton Healthcare (GI) – the most lucrative race of Churchill Downs' 21-day Fall Meet – with homegrown 4-year-old colt **Seeking the Soul**, who ran down pacesetter favorite **Diversify** and turned back late runs by 3-year-old **Good Samaritan** and \$4.2 million-earner **Hoppertunity**.

"It's a great honor to win a race like this for Mr. Fipke and Dallas," said Velazquez, the two-time Eclipse Award-winning New York-based rider who won the Clark for a third time. "It's been a really good month."

The well-bred Seeking the Soul, by Perfect Soul (IRE) out of Fipke's Seeking the Gold mare Seeking the Title, broke through with his first stakes win in a 17-race career by defeating eight 3-year-olds and up and clocking 1 1/8 miles over a "fast" track in 1:48.88.

The lofty \$297,600 first prize more than doubled the bay Kentucky-bred's earnings to \$551,162 with a record of 5-3-5 in 17 starts.

"It's been a great month," Stewart said. "I'm so happy to win another Grade I for Mr. Fipke. He's allowed me to space out his races and I think that's helped in his development. It was a great effort and a great accomplishment to win the Clark."

New York-bred Diversify, who was sent to post as the 7-5 favorite after winning the prestigious Jockey Club Gold Cup (GI) at Belmont Park on Oct. 7, did not help himself as he pulled jockey **Irad Ortiz Jr.** in the early stages while dictated terms through a first quarter mile in :23.34, the half in :47.35 and six furlongs in 1:11.14. Meanwhile, Seeking the Soul, Jim Dandy (GII) winner Good Samaritan and Hoppertunity comprised the last three runners in the field of nine down the backstretch.

Diversify had a 1 1/2-length advantage around the turn and into the stretch as the closers commenced their late charges.

Seeking the Soul, who broke from post 2, went around rival **Destin** as the field left the far turn and looked as if he might try to slip to the inside of front-running Diversify. But Velazquez shifted Seeking the Soul to the outside of Diversify's right hip at the three-sixteenths pole, took over with a furlong to run and turned back late runs from Good Samaritan and Hoppertunity, who both rallied from the far outside and finished a half-length and one-length back of the winner, respectively.

Hoppertunity's jockey **Florent Geroux** lodged a claim of foul against the winner, claiming Seeking the Soul drifted outward in the final stages and possibly costing him a placing, but the **Kentucky Horse Racing Commission** stewards made no change after reviewing the video tape.

"I had to steady a little bit at about 50 yards (from the finish), so I didn't really know if (Seeking the Soul) really came out," Geroux said.

Seeking the Soul, who carried 116 pounds, rewarded his backers with mutuels of \$17.80, \$8.60 and \$5 as the 7-1 sixth-betting choice in the field of nine. New York-based Good Samaritan, at 118 pounds with **Joel Rosario** aboard, returned \$7 and \$4.40. Hoppertunity, the Southern California-based horse and 2014 Clark winner who was making his fourth appearance in the race, paid \$4.40 to show under Geroux at 123 pounds – the co-high weight with Diversify.

Diversify faded 1 ¾ lengths back of the third place finisher and was followed by 4-1 second-betting choice **The Player**, Destin, **Goats Town**, **Mo Tom** and **Honorable Duty**. The latter was eased in the stretch but walked back to his barn.

“He broke a little slow, but he’s so fast so he made the lead on his own,” said Diversify’s jockey **Irad Ortiz Jr.** “He was cruising, but about the three-eighths pole it seemed he didn’t handle the track well. He was stumbling a little bit, and I think he lost the bit. But he still ran a good race. He got beat by good horses.”

Prior to the Clark, Seeking the Soul won a conditioned allowance/optional claiming event over 1 1/16 miles at Keeneland by nine lengths on Oct. 21. Before that, he finished third in the \$200,000 Lukas Classic (GIII) at Churchill Downs on Sept. 30.

The winning connections had high hopes for Seeking the Soul last year as a 3-year-old and entered him in the Belmont Stakes, but the colt tired and beat only one rival.

“He doesn’t really like the whip he gets all over the racetrack,” Stewart said. “I told (previous jockey) **Brian (Hernandez Jr.)** in his last start to not hit him with the stick and try it out and it really worked. He’s mean but he’s a big and healthy horse. After he won the allowance race in his last start at Keeneland I really wanted to run him right back in the Breeders’ Cup Classic (GI) but I settled down and thought about it and pointed him for this race. I think we got a bit aggressive with him early in his career when we tried in the Belmont Stakes but I knew he was that caliber of horse.”

Racing resumes Saturday at Churchill Downs with a 12-race program that begins at 1 p.m. (all times Eastern). The 91st running of the \$200,000 Kentucky Jockey Club (GII) – a “Prep Season” race on the Road to the Kentucky Derby – and the 74th running of the \$200,000 Golden Rod (GII) for fillies are the headliners on the second-to-last day of Churchill Downs’ 21-date Fall Meet. Billed as “Stars of Tomorrow II,” each of the 12 races is exclusively for 2-year-olds that may have aspirations of trail-blazing their way to next spring’s Kentucky Derby Presented by Woodford Reserve and Longines Kentucky Oaks.

There’s a carryover of \$87,305 on the 20-cent minimum Single 6 Jackpot, which covers Races 7-12 starting at 3:57 p.m. If the jackpot is not hit by a single winning combination on Saturday, there will be a mandatory payout on Sunday’s 12-race finale.

## CLARK HANDICAP QUOTES

**JOHN VELAZQUEZ**, jockey of **SEEKING THE SOUL (winner)**: “I watched the race at Keeneland in his last start and he got really aggressive in the stretch. I got him out around the eighth pole and he drifted out a little bit but I don’t think the third-place finisher would have won anyway. I corrected him right away by just showing him the whip and got clear. It’s a great honor to win a race like this for Mr. Fipke and Dallas. It’s been a really good month.”

**DALLAS STEWART**, trainer of **SEEKING THE SOUL (winner)**: “It’s been a great month. This horse is the grandson to Personal Ensign so he is very well-bred. I’m so happy to win another Grade I for Mr. Fipke. He’s allowed me to space out his races and I think that’s helped in his development. It was a great effort and a great accomplishment to win the Clark. I haven’t really thought about next year yet. I’ll enjoy this race and have a great dinner tonight.

“He doesn’t really like the whip he gets all over the racetrack. I told Brian (Hernandez Jr.) in his last start to not hit him with the stick and try it out and it really worked. He’s mean but he’s a big and healthy horse. After he won the allowance race in his last start at Keeneland I really wanted to run him right back in the Breeders’ Cup Classic (GI) but I settled down and thought about it and pointed him for this race. I think we got a bit aggressive with him early in his career when we tried in the Belmont Stakes (GI) but I knew he was that caliber of horse.”

**BILL MOTT (via telephone)**, trainer of **GOOD SAMARITAN (runner-up)**: “He ran an awfully good race. You can’t take anything away from the winner, but we ran well. He had a pretty good trip. He had to maybe tap on the brakes a little bit at the half-mile pole, so I guess I’ve got to see it again. But he ran up there and had his chance to win and we just didn’t get it done, but he ran a very good race.”

**Q: What was your thinking in the decision to send him down here for the Clark?** “We wanted to shorten him up to a mile-and-an-eighth. We wanted to go a mile or a mile-and-an-eighth with him and that’s what we did. When he came out of his last race this was the first race I thought of, then we started to consider the Cigar Mile, but we opted for this one.”

**Q: Will he get a little time now?** “He’ll go to WinStar for two or three weeks and then he’ll join up with us in Florida, I guess.”

**JOEL ROSARIO, jockey on GOOD SAMARITAN (runner-up):** “He put in a good run at the end. I thought for a second we were going to get the horse on the lead, but the one on the lead just looked like he had another gear, so it was a little tough to go by him. But it was good effort for him.”

**JIM BARNES, assistant to trainer BOB BAFFERT, trainer of HOPPERTUNITY (third):** “He ran very well. He dropped back early. That’s the way he runs; he doesn’t have that early speed and if he didn’t have to go so wide maybe he could have gotten there. The 2 (Seeking the Soul) was definitely coming out. At least we placed. He was running, so did have hopes that he might get there. But he ran third, so we have a Grade I-placing and we’re in good shape.”

**FLORENT GEROUX, jockey on HOPPERTUNITY (third):** “He made a nice run on the turn and I thought I might have it for a minute. I had to steady a little bit at about 50 yards, so I didn’t really know if the 2 (Seeking the Soul) really came out.”

**Q: *You were far back early – is that pretty much where you thought you’d be?*** “You know he’s not been showing much speed lately, but he has a very nice kick and he ran well.”

**IRAD ORTIZ JR., jockey on DIVERSIFY (fourth as the favorite):** “He broke a little slow, but he’s so fast so he made the lead on his own. He was cruising, but about the three-eighths pole it seemed he didn’t handle the track well. He was stumbling a little bit, and I think he lost the bit. But he still ran a good race. He got beat by good horses.”

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